

# The Cherwell Singers

present

## *‘Give unto the Lord’*

Psalm Settings by  
Twentieth Century English Composers

**James Brown** conductor

**Steven Grahl** organ

**Victoria Sheehan-Dare** clarinet

Sunday, 28th March 2010  
The Chapel of Exeter College, Oxford

# Programme

Edward Elgar  
(1857-1934)

Give unto the Lord  
*Psalm 29: vv1-5, 7, 9-10*

Lennox Berkeley  
(1903-1989)

The Lord is my Shepherd  
*Psalm 23: vv1-4*

Soprano - Beatrix Stewart

*organ solo:*

Percy Whitlock  
(1903-1946)

Plaint  
*Psalm 6: v2*

Herbert Howells  
(1892-1983)

Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks  
*Psalm 42: vv1-3*

Ralph Vaughan Williams  
(1872-1958)

O clap your hands  
*Psalm 47: vv1-2, 5-8*

## Interval

William Walton  
(1902-1983)

O be joyful in the Lord  
*Psalm 100*

Herbert Sumsion  
(1899-1995)

They that go down to the sea in ships  
*Psalm 107: vv23-30*

*organ solo:*

Percy Whitlock  
(1903-1946)

*Exultemus*  
*Psalm 81: vv1-3*

John Rutter  
(1945- )

The Lord is my light and my salvation  
*Psalm 27: vv1, 3-5, 7-12, 16*

Hubert Parry  
(1848-1918)

I was Glad  
*Psalm 122: vv1-3, 6-7*

**The Book of Psalms**, part of the Hebrew Bible, is perhaps the earliest book of poems written to be sung that we have. We know that singing was intended, not only because the texts cry out for music, but because some of them have a note attached giving the name of the tune to be used or other directions. The psalms have long been an integral part of Christian worship, both in literal translation, and in metrical translations that can be sung as hymns.

Hebrew poetry is different in form from the pattern familiar to us. Instead of the poetic structure being built on patterns of rhyme and rhythm, there is a pattern of meaning, known as parallelism. In the psalms, each verse is divided into two parts that express the same thought in different ways, or related or even opposed thoughts. The irregularity of rhythm that results makes for greater interest and variety in musical settings of the psalms than is likely in settings of strophic metrical verse. (It has been argued, however, that as the original pronunciation of biblical times must have been lost, there may also be aspects of rhyme that we now miss.)

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century English Composers**

Looking back at the twentieth century now that we have left it, we can begin to see it in perspective. Although at times it seemed that ‘modern music’ was determined to find new means of expression – especially that associated with the second Viennese school – we can now see that much of it developed smoothly from the more approachable traditions of the nineteenth century, even when breaking with some of the formal rules of structures of earlier times. In no country is this more apparent than England, where the second Viennese school was answered by the English Pastoral school; and in no kind of music is it more clear than in service music written for Anglican choirs. Vocal and choral music, by its nature, requires a melody, supported by harmony, and the almost timeless traditions of the church service impose a strong discipline as well. Thus the music we are presenting tonight might appear at first hearing to be conservative in style; but in fact almost all of it contains elements that could not have been written at any earlier time.

**Edward Elgar** had ambitions to study music in Leipzig, but it could never be afforded and he was almost entirely self taught. His church music is firmly rooted in his Roman Catholicism and in his early years as an organist. Yet, paradoxically, it is also inseparably associated with the Anglican Cathedral in Worcester, where he played the violin in the orchestra at concerts of the Three Choirs Festival and later conducted his own works.

**Give unto the Lord** was written for the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary service of the Festival of the Sons of the Clergy at St Paul's Cathedral in 1914, and was dedicated to Sir George Martin, the organist there. It has the grandeur suited to St Paul's, and was first heard with orchestral accompaniment, though simulataneously published for organ. Elgar responds to the words of Psalm 29 with vigorous and powerfully contrapuntal choral writing, but with a gentle central interlude providing contrast. At the end, the words 'the blessing of peace' are echoed round the choir, and one wonders if Elgar had a premonition in April 1914 of the Great War that was soon to engulf Europe.

Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty : give unto the Lord glory and strength.

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name : worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters : the God of glory thundereth.

It is the Lord that ruleth the sea; the voice of the Lord is mighty in operation : the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars : yea, the Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

Yea, the voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire : yea, the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness and strippeth the forests bare.

In his temple doth everyone speak of his glory.

*Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.*

The Lord sitteth above the water-flood : and the Lord remaineth a King for ever;

The Lord shall give strength unto his people : the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

**Lennox Berkeley** was born in Oxford, and educated at the Dragon School, Gresham's School and Merton College. In 1927, he went to Paris to study music with Boulanger and Ravel (who described him as 'my only pupil who didn't try to write my music'). He enjoyed a long association with Benjamin Britten, another old boy of Gresham's School, with whom he collaborated on a number of works. One critic has called him 'the leading

Francophile amongst British musicians’, and there is indeed a certain ‘French polish’ about his music; yet it is also profoundly and unmistakably English, with a little built-in emotional reticence.

Anthems such as **The Lord Is My Shepherd** (written for the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Chichester Cathedral in 1975) form an idiosyncratic part of Berkeley’s output. He was more temperamentally inclined away from the consciously nationalistic English musical renaissance of the early and middle twentieth century, and furthermore, as a Roman Catholic, he did not often venture into the predominantly Anglican genre of the choral anthem. Finally, as he grew older his musical language and compositional techniques expanded to include serialism and other atonal practices, developing a darker and more brooding style; but of these there is no trace in this work, though it does show his penchant for the neo-Classical style.

The Lord is my shepherd : I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures : he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul : he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me.

**Percy Whitlock** was born in Chatham. At the Royal College of Music he studied organ with Henry Ley (organist of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford) and composition with Vaughan Williams. After a period as assistant organist at Rochester Cathedral, he moved to Bournemouth, where in 1932 he became the Borough Organist at the Municipal Pavilion - which position required him to play light music as well as the classics. A friend wrote of him: ‘His personality carried with it an atmosphere of serenity and gentleness seldom encountered in these sophisticated and disingenuous times. He had, too, a virile wit and sense of fun.’

Whitlock's catalogue is not extensive; the main corpus is the organ music, which comprises more concert repertoire than religiously inspired works. In many ways his music is quite conservative; he never attempts to surprise the listener with harmonic or formal novelties. Yet on the other side, although much of his writing has a light quality to it (sometimes it is possible to hear echoes of the cinema organ), it never becomes sentimental

or trite, and he never allows the quality of his writing to slip. This evening we hear two pieces from Whitlock's collection: **Seven Sketches on Verses from the Psalms** (1934).

### **Plaint**

Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak : O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed.

### *Exultemus*

Sing we merrily unto God our strength : make a cheerful noise unto the God of Jacob.

Take the psalm, bring hither the tabret : the merry harp with the lute.

Blow up the trumpet in the new-moon : even in the time appointed, and upon our solemn feast-day.

**Herbert Howells** was born in Lydney, Gloucestershire, the youngest of six children. His father was an amateur organist, and Howells himself showed early musical promise. He studied first with Herbert Brewer at Gloucester Cathedral, and later at the Royal College of Music under Stanford and Parry.

In January 1941, shortly after being bombed out of their home, Howells and his wife were snowed up in a Gloucestershire cottage. To pass the time, he wrote several anthems, including **Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks**, which he dedicated to Thomas Armstrong, then organist of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. The longing of the Psalmist is set most expressively and the phrases are so carefully shaped that one can hardly think of those words set in any other way. There is a touch of excitement at the words 'Where is now thy God', but the general mood of the piece is one of restraint and a quiet beauty. It ends in the utmost serenity with one of those long drawn-out cadences, the organ having the final say. Although now thought of as typically Anglican in style, its rhythm is that of a slow blues, and its harmony is thick with 'blue' notes.

Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks : so longeth my soul after thee, O God.  
My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God : when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?

My tears have been my meat day and night : while they daily say unto me,  
Where is now thy God?

**Ralph Vaughan Williams** was a great-nephew of Charles Darwin. He studied the piano and violin at the Royal College of Music, and music and history at Cambridge. He was a major contributor to the collection of English folk song, and also composed works in all the major genres. Despite his substantial involvement in church music, and the religious subject-matter of many of his works, he was described by his second wife as ‘an atheist who later drifted into a cheerful agnosticism.’

Of the broad straightforward choral style of **O clap your hands** (1920) Michael Kennedy remarks how apt it is to its purpose of ‘filling a great cathedral with joyous sounds’. Vaughan Williams writes for the voices as he might for brass ensemble; the opening trumpet call is imitated exactly in the first treble phrase, and the choir typically sings homophonically in rhythmic double triads. It is however not quite as straightforward as all that in every respect: there are moments when choir and organ seem to be in untypical harmonic conflict (eg ‘Sing praises unto our King’). Mistake? No, he evidently meant these clashes; and we can relish them for their unexpectedness.

O clap your hands, all ye people : shout unto God with the voice of triumph.  
For the Lord most high is terrible : He is a great King over all the earth.  
God is gone up with a shout : the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.  
Sing praises to God, sing praises : sing praises to our King; sing praises.  
For God is the King of all the earth : sing ye praises with understanding.  
God reigneth over the heathen : God sitteth upon the throne of His holiness.  
Sing praises unto our King. Sing praises.

**William Walton** was a chorister at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, and then entered Oxford University at the unusually young age of 16; however, he left at the age of 20 without gaining a degree. As a composer he was largely self taught. Alongside his output of orchestral, choral and chamber works, he wrote a number of film scores, and anthems, such as *The Twelve* (written for Christ Church Cathedral).

Walton wrote **O be joyful in the Lord** for the 1972 English Bach Festival in Oxford, and it was first performed in Christ Church Cathedral. The text with its mood of praise, joy and thanksgiving lends itself to upbeat, punchy musical setting, and Walton does not disappoint in this respect. The organ sets the mood with a guilelessly jolly dotted-rhythm introduction which is

taken up by the choir, divided at first into two. After a section for semichorus, and a brief solo, the choir begins the exciting build-up to the final doxology, in which the opening music triumphantly reappears, coming to a blazing finish with the full organ.

O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands : serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with a song.

Be ye sure that the Lord he is God : it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise : be thankful unto him, and speak good of his Name.

For the Lord is gracious, his mercy is everlasting : and his truth endureth from generation to generation.

Glory be to the Father : and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

**Herbert Sumsion** was born in Gloucester, and sang in the choir of the cathedral as a chorister. He gained his Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists at the age of only 17. He was organist of Gloucester Cathedral from 1928 to 1967, during which time he was responsible for the Three Choirs' Festival every third year. He is remembered as a cathedral musician, and as an organist and teacher.

**They that go down to the sea in ships** (1979) was written for the choir of Repton Preparatory School. The piece unfolds with a remarkable economy of material: a rippling, listless organ part suggests the sea, with an attractive solo melody over it; and rising and falling choral writing depicts the movement of the ship and the staggering of its sailors.

They that go down to the sea in ships : and occupy their business in great waters;  
These men see the works of the Lord : and his wonders in the deep.

For at his word the stormy wind ariseth : which lifteth up the waves thereof.

They are carried up to the heav'n, and down again to the deep : their soul melteth away because of the trouble.

They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man : and are at their wits' end.  
So when they cry unto the Lord in their trouble : he delivereth them out of their distress.

For he maketh the storm to cease : so that the waves thereof are still.

Then are they glad because they are at rest : and so he bringeth them unto the haven where they would be.

**John Rutter** was educated at Highgate School, where he became an accomplished organist; as a student at Cambridge University, he became involved with music in the college chapels, and by the mid-1970s he was director of music at his old college, Clare. Since then he has made a remarkable contribution to the repertoire.

**The Lord is my light and my salvation** was written in the early 1990s at the request of a friend of Rutter's who was at the time the director of chapel music at Duke University in North Carolina. A sufferer from AIDS, he knew that his time was short and had taken particular comfort from the words of Psalm 27, which Rutter sets here. The music, featuring a prominent, liquid clarinet obbligato part, mirrors the psalmist's restless but fruitful search for consolation.

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then I shall fear : The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?

Though an host of men were laid against me, yet shall not my heart be afraid : and though there rose up war against me, yet will I put my trust in him.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will require : even that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to visit his temple.

For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his tabernacle : yea, in the secret place of his dwelling shall he hide me, and set me up upon a rock of stone.

Therefore will I offer in his dwelling an obligation with great gladness : I will sing, and speak praises unto the Lord.

Hearken unto my voice, O Lord, when I cry unto thee : have mercy upon me, and hear me.

My heart hath talked of thee, Seek ye my face : Thy face, Lord, will I seek.

O hide not thou thy face from me : nor cast thy servant away in displeasure.

Thou has been my succour : leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

When my father and my mother forsake me : the Lord taketh me up.

Be strong, and he shall comfort thine heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord.

**Hubert Parry** was a gifted organist, but he never held any church music appointment. On going down from Oxford he continued his musical studies privately, but he was in his thirties before he began to be noticed as a composer. He returned to Oxford as Professor of Music in 1900. Since Parry's professional career as educator and administrator kept him away from day-to-day involvement in church music, it is natural that the best known of his choral works should have been written in response to commissions for special occasions.

**I was glad** was written for the Coronation of Edward VII in Westminster Abbey in 1902. Parry's anthem, which is sung at the entrance of the Sovereign, incorporated the acclamation '*Vivat Rex Edwardus*'; in general use this section is omitted, and of course it is not part of the psalm. The choir for the performance at that coronation contained 430 voices, and was so spread out that several sub-conductors were used to keep them together.

I was glad when they said unto me : we will go into the house of the Lord.  
Our feet shall stand in thy gates : O Jerusalem.  
Jerusalem is builded as a city : that is at unity in itself.  
O pray for the peace of Jerusalem : they shall prosper that love thee.  
Peace be within thy walls : and plenteousness within thy palaces.

## **Steven Grahl** organ

Steven combines the post of Assistant Organist at New College, Oxford with that of Organist & Director of Music at St Marylebone Parish Church, London and the Principal Conductorship of the Guildford Chamber Choir. A prize-winning graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford (where he was Organ Scholar) and the Royal Academy of Music, Steven gained the Limpus (highest mark) and Dixon (improvisation) prizes in his FRCO examination, and is also a holder of the Worshipful Company of Musicians' Silver Medallion.

## **Victoria Sheehan-Dare** clarinet

Victoria started playing the clarinet at the age of nine, until recently studying with John Mellor from the Orchestra of Opera North. At the age of sixteen she gained a place in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. Recent concerto appearances include Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in Leeds Town Hall and Copland's Clarinet Concerto in Ripon. Victoria is currently in her third year of her Music degree at New College, Oxford, where she is both an instrumental and an academic scholar. Victoria has broadened her musical skills during her time at Oxford; last year she was joint president of New College Music Society as well as the principal clarinettist of both Oxford University Philharmonia and Oxford University Orchestra, and in 2009 she managed and conducted Oxford New Orchestra.

## **James Brown** conductor

James was Organ Scholar of Girton College, Cambridge and upon graduating studied organ at the Conservatoire de Musique, Geneva with Lionel Rogg. After two years working as an organist in Texas James returned to England where he is currently Organist of the University Church, Oxford and a lay clerk in New College Choir, with whom he tours to America next month. James currently studies the organ with David Sanger.

James has conducted the Cherwell Singers since 2007.

# The Cherwell Singers

## **Soprano**

Sue Bignal  
Julia Craig-McFeely  
Alison Gunter  
Rachel Smith  
Rachel Slade  
Beatrix Stewart  
Marie Thebaud-Sorger  
Judith Ward

## **Tenor**

Philip Booth  
Phillip Endean  
Paul King  
Guy Peskett  
David Sutton

## **Alto**

Virginia Allport  
Katherine Butler  
Kipper Chipperfield  
Gillian Hargreaves  
Clare Jarvis  
Janet McKnight  
Jo McLean  
Lizzie Newton  
Sally Prime

## **Bass**

Neil Herington  
Paul Hodges  
Simeon Mitchell  
Iain McLean  
Tim Wainwright

Next concert:

Rossini's Petite messe solennelle  
Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Please visit our web site to learn more about the choir, and listen to some of our recordings online. Use the web form to register yourself on our email list, to ensure you receive notification and full details of future concerts.

[www.cherwellsingers.org](http://www.cherwellsingers.org)